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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ANDREW YOUNG PUSHES RECONCILIATION IN HAITI

Ref: PAP 1039

1. (U) Summary: Former Ambassador Andrew Young visited Haiti May 18-20, delivering a welcome message of optimism about Haiti's future and encouraging Haitians to put mercy and reconciliation above the search for justice. In meetings with a cross-section of Haitian leaders, he shared his experiences in building bridges in the U.S. and in conflict-ridden societies. Young emphasized the importance of improving the lot of Haiti's poor majority. Young also visited former Prime Minister Neptune in jail and urged him to cooperate in resolving his case. Even though Young's message of mercy and reconciliation before justice was challenged by some of his interlocutors, his visit was welcomed by all sectors of society and may give a needed boost to the so-far anemic process of National Dialogue. End summary.

2. (U) Young's visit was put together as a joint effort by the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) and the Embassy's Public Diplomacy section. AMCHAM President Philippe Armande invited Young to visit in the wake of Young's participation in AMCHAM's post-flood humanitarian efforts in Gonaives last year. Young is well-known in Haiti for his 1977 intervention, as U.S. Ambassador to the UN, that led to the release of several political prisoners under "Baby Doc." This background, plus his experience as a close collaborator of Martin Luther King in the U.S. civil rights movement and his work helping to resolve numerous conflicts throughout the world, made him a compelling and respected figure to address Haiti's current problems. In the course of his three days in Haiti, he met with the interim President and Prime Minister, business leaders, the recently-established Preparatory Commission for National Dialogue, civil society and political party leaders, and the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). He gave a widely-covered speech at an AMCHAM-organized dinner, was the guest of honor at a reception at the Ambassador's residence, visited several relief projects in Gonaives, and visited a children's soccer clinic just outside Cite Soleil run by Bobby Duval, one of the prisoners who was released after Young's 1977 intervention.

3. (U) Young's message, was straightforward. Haiti's continuing problems, rooted in economic and social inequities, cannot be solved if Haitians do not truly come together, forgive, and agree to address them cooperatively and non-violently. The challenge in Haiti, is to bring the benefits of democracy and free enterprise to all people, especially the poor. The most effective way to move forward is not to search for justice and punish those who have done wrong in the past, but to forgive and move on. He also emphasized anti-corruption, suggesting to political and business leaders that they stop tolerating those who steal and stop doing it themselves. To the business community, Young devoted considerable time establishing a case for reaching out to the poor. Using examples of his work as Mayor of Atlanta, Young conveyed ways to enrich the poor and that the results help both to move society forward and to generate even more wealth for the rich. Throughout his visit, Young stressed repeatedly his optimism that the transition in Haiti would succeed, pointing out that elections and reconciliation had occurred in many countries with far worse security situations and far worse violence.

4. (U) The most provocative element of this message was his insistence that, as he told a group of civil society leaders, "reconciliation is a quicker path to peace than justice." He suggested that Haitians would have to keep going back years and years to find complete "justice." He cited examples ranging from Rwanda to Algeria to Nigeria to South Africa to illustrate his point that progress in post-conflict societies was made only when all sides in the conflict gave up pursuing punishment for those who had committed wrongs, forgave their former enemies, and focused on working together for the future. Young said he would have "wasted Dr. King's legacy" if he had focused on finding King's killers rather than trying to accomplish King's goals. Trials and proceedings against people for previous wrongdoings only dragged out the process in a negative way. Asked specifically by a businessman what he thought Haiti's "first step" should be to move forward, Young did not hesitate: "A blanket amnesty and forgiveness."

15. (SBU) This message, against the backdrop of numerous legal cases underway against former Lavalas government officials and widespread unhappiness with the dysfunctional justice system here, did not sit well with some. KID leader (and Presidential candidate) Evans Paul said that "forgiveness should go hand-in-hand with the truth;...the page should be read first before it is turned." Yannick Lahens, G-184 activist, told Young that Haiti had suffered so long from impunity and the lack of justice that reconciliation could not come until those were addressed. "Forgiveness is important, yes," she said, "but first you have to know who you are forgiving, and why." She noted that even in Rwanda and South Africa, there had been some trials and processes. Lahens' point was echoed by other participants from the anti-Aristide movement. Young did not back down, insisting that "extreme mercy" was a better answer than the pursuit of justice in individual cases.

16. (U) Others found Young's message more compelling. Prime Minister Latortue publicly agreed with Young, welcoming his message of "tolerance and acceptance of other people" and acknowledging that justice in Haiti was often colored with vengeance. Lucwansch Duvalsaint, the head of an association of former Lavalas mayors (an association that appears to fall in the "moderate" Lavalas camp), argued that justice in Haiti had always been "victors' justice" and that the IGOH's pursuit of legal charges against former Lavalas government officials would not be any different.

#### National Dialogue moving slowly forward

17. (SBU) Ambassador Young's visit threw a needed spotlight on the still-embryonic formal National Dialogue process launched in April by President Alexandre (reftel). Members of the National Dialogue Preparatory Commission, although not yet formally announced, met twice with Young, including once in a lunch hosted by President Alexandre. Catholic Bishop Francois Gaillot, whom the Commission members elected as their chairman, told Young that the Commission had a clearly defined mandate to help publicize the National Dialogue and help the government establish the technical secretariat and Steering Committee to actually run the

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National Dialogue. He pointed to the Commission's diversity as a strength, noting that it included representatives of all religious sectors (including voodoo), all political sectors (from Guy Philippe's FRN party to Lavalas), and several civil society sectors. Asked what progress had been made, however, Gaillot and other members could only point to the several "productive" meetings they have held as the Commission. Presidential counselor Jean-Claude Paulvin told PolCounselor on the margins that the official decree naming the Preparatory Commission would be issued within the next few days, launching the 60-day period within which the Commission would have to complete its work. (Note: The decree was published in a ceremony at the Palace May 31. End note)

#### Visit to Neptune

18. (SBU) Young, accompanied by the Ambassador and SRSG Valdes, visited former Prime Minister Neptune for approximately 20 minutes in his jail cell. Young urged Neptune to cooperate with government and MINUSTAH efforts to resolve his case. Neptune ultimately agreed to talk to the investigating judge. At his departure press conference, Young described Neptune as a "man of very strong spirit." (NOTE: Neptune was transported by MINUSTAH helicopter to St. Marc for a hearing on May 25, then returned to his prison annex in Port-au-Prince. Neptune cooperated with the judge, answering questions for almost four hours.)

#### Follow Up

19. Ambassador Foley used his next public appearance, a youth sports awards ceremony, to reinforce Ambassador Young's message of mercy and reconciliation. The Office of Public Diplomacy is preparing highlighted transcripts in Creole, French and English, for targeted dissemination. An American expert on the civil rights Movement will hold a session for journalists, political parties and civil society, to dissect Ambassador Young's speeches in Haiti, explaining how these principles brought about the lasting success of Martin Luther King and his followers.

#### Comment

110. (SBU) Ambassador Young's message on the importance of reconciliation was the right message at the right time; it needs to be heard in this land where "justice" is rarely just and where the victors rarely reach out to the defeated. But as the reactions from many highlight, the prospects for setting aside the many cries for punishment and retribution

- often couched as demands for an end to judicial impunity -  
- and moving forward based on forgiveness are not great.  
That will only happen, in our view, if the international  
community makes this a central focus of its engagement here  
for a sustained period of time.

10. (SBU) Young's visit also highlighted the lack of any  
real movement so far in the National Dialogue process  
launched with fanfare nearly two months ago (and talked  
about for many months previous to that). As we noted in  
April, the government has taken a very cumbersome,  
bureaucratic approach to the project which does not inspire  
great confidence that any real dialogue will happen in the  
months before the elections. Other efforts, e.g. a series  
of political party meetings being organized by MINUSTAH  
(reftel) and the Norwegian-funded discussions about an  
electoral code of conduct, are proving more fruitful in the  
short term. Now that the National Dialogue Preparatory  
Commission has been formally established with a 60-day  
mandate to prepare the next phase, we hope that the focus  
Young has brought to the central issue of reconciliation  
will give the process a needed boost.

Foley